

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CANBER 02913 150826Z

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-20 SP-03 INR-10 IO-14 EUR-25 NSC-07

CIAE-00 SAM-01 DRC-01 RSC-01 /097 W

----- 023837

R 150642Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3188

INFO AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 2913

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, KS, KN, AS

SUBJ: AUSTRALIAN CONTACTS WITH NORTH KOREA

REF: A) SEOUL 3010 B) CANBERRA 2521

1. SUMMARY: EXCHANGE OF PUBLIC STATEMENTS BETWEEN ROK AMBASSADOR LO AND AUSTRALIAN MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS WILLESEE SHOULD BE SEEN AGAINST BACKGROUND OF AUSTRALIAN ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN, WHICH ENDS WITH ELECTION DAY, MAY 18. AMBASSADOR LO GAVE ME DETAILS OF HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH AUSTRALIANS ON THIS EPISODE. DFA TELLS US THAT NO ACTION ON NORTH KOREAN CONTACT WILL BE TAKEN UNTIL ELECTIONS OVER AND NEW GOVERNMENT FORMED. IF OPPOSITION WINS, IT WILL BE UP TO NEW MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS TO DECIDE ON WHETHER TO CONTINUE CONTACT WITH NORTH KOREA. HOWEVER, AS REPORTED IN REF B, OPPOSITION WILL NOT PURSUE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS WITH DPRK IF IT WINS ELECTION MAY 19. END SUMMARY.

2. RECENT PUBLIC EXCHANGE OF CRITICAL COMMENTS BETWEEN KOREAN AMBASSADOR LO AND AUSTRALIAN MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS WILLESEE (REF A) SHOULD BE SEEN AGAINST BACKDROP OF AUSTRALIAN ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN. ELECTION DAY IS MAY 18. AMBASSADOR LO MADE HIS COMMENTS TO REPORTERS AT SYDNEY AIRPORT MAY 8 ON RETURN FROM HOME LEAVE IN SEOUL, AND WILLESEE STATEMENT IN REPLY ON MAY 9 WAS CLEARLY PREPARED AND ISSUED IN HASTE, WITH AN OBVIOUS EYE ON ELECTIONS. INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT AMBASSADOR LO'S COMMENTS AND WILLESEE STATEMENT

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PAGE 02 CANBER 02913 150826Z

REPEATED, ALMOST WORD FOR WORD, PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS THEY HAD

PREVIOUSLY HELD.

3. AMBASSADOR LO GAVE ME MYA 15 FOLLOWING RUNDOWN ON HIS RUN-IN WITH GOA. LO SAID HE TOOK ADVANTAGE OF TV INTERVIEW TO EXPRESS ROK OPPOSITION TO GOA RECOGNITION OF NORTH KOREA. WILLESEE'S STATEMENT OF MAY 9, IN EFFECT CRITICIZING AMBASSADOR LO, WAS FOLLOWED UP BY DFA SECRETARY ALAN RENOUF CALLING AMBASSADOR LO TO HIS OFFICE TO PROTEST HIS TV STATEMENT.

4. LO SAID THAT WHEN HE WAS CALLED IN BY RENOUF HE WAS INFORMED THAT WHITLAM AND WILLESEE WERE DISPLEASED BY HIS TV STATEMENT AND EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT IT COULD BE USED BO OPPOSITION DURING ELECTION CAMPAIGN TO EMBARRASS GOVERNMENT. LO RESPONDED BY DISCLAIMING ANY SUCH INTENTION TO INTERFERE IN THE ELECTIONS AND THAT HE WAS MERELY STATING A WELL KNOWN FACT ABOUT ROK OPPOSITION TO RECOGNITION OF NORTH KOREA BY OTHER COUNTRIES. HE TOLD RENOUF THAT SUCH RECOGNITION WAS TOLERABLE IF NORTH KOREA WERE TO JOIN UN ALONG WITH ROK OR IF COMMUNIST COUNTRIES WERE PREPARED ALSO TO ENTER INTO RELATIONS WITH SEOUL. HE TOOK OCCASION TO INFORM RENOUF ABOUT INTENSIFIED NORTH KOREAN MILITARY PRESSURES ALONG DMZ AND SEIZURES OF ROK FISHING VESSELS AND TO DESCRIBE RECENT NORTH KOREAN DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS IN EASTERN EUROPE AND ELSEWHERE TO BROADEN NK DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WHILE AT THE SAME TIME PRESSURING THESE COUNTRIES NOT TO RECOGNIZE SOUTH KOREA. IN GENERAL DISCUSSION ABOUT ROK-AUSTRALIAN RELATIONS, LO ALLUDED TO ANTICIPATED INCREASED ROK PURCHASES FROM AUSTRALIA, ESPECIALLY IRON ORE.

5. LO ALSO TOLD ME THAT AUSTRALIANS HAD BEEN SOUNDING OUT ROKG AS TO WHETHER IT WOULD DROP ITS OBJECTIONS TO GOA RECOGNITION OF NORTH KOREA IF GOA DELAYED THIS ACTION FOR ANOTHER SIX MONTHS. ACCORDING TO LO, ROKG RESPONSE HAS BEEN THAT IT WOULD NOT LIKE TO SET ANY SPECIFIC TIME LIMIT. IT WAS LO'S IMPRESSION THAT WHITLAM GOVERNMENT, IF RE-ELECTED, WOULD BE HESITANT ABOUT MOVING RIGHT AWAY TO RECOGNIZE NORTH KOREA, ASIDE FROM FACT THAT TALKS IN JAKARTA WITH NORTH KOREA WERE STALMATED. HENCE, AUSTRALIA WAS SIMPLY TRYING TO MAKE THE BEST OF THIS SITUATION THROUGH THE ABOVE PROPOSED DEAL. LO EVIDENCED NO CONCERN THAT LIBERAL-COUNTRY COALITION, IF ELECTED, WOULD CONTINUE GOA EFFORTS TO RECOGNIZE NORTH KOREA.

6. PERHAPS THE FOLLOWING IS OLD HAT TO SEOUL AND WASHINGTON, BUT I
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PAGE 03 CANBER 02913 150826Z

REPORT IT FOR WHAT IT IS WORTH. LO SAID THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WAS INTERESTED IN BROADENING ECONOMIC TIES WITH EAST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. TALKS WERE NOW GOING ON IN ROME BETWEEN CZECH AND ROK DCM'S WITH REGARD TO A CZECH PROPOSAL FOR ESTABLISHING A JOINT VENTURE IN ROK. WHEN I ASKED LO WHAT KIND OF VENTURE, HE SAID HE DID NOT KNOW. LO ALSO REFERRED TO FEELERS ROKG IS EXTENDING TO USSR REGARDING TRADE, INCLUDING ROK PURCHASES OF SIBERIAN COAL. ROKG HAS BEEN ENCOURAGED BY FACT THAT SOVIETS ARE PERMITTING TRANSIT ROK SHIPMENTS TO EUROPE BY

TRANS-SIBERIAN. THIS IS HANDLED BY A SWISS FIRM. LO OBSERVED THAT THE CHINESE REMAINED HARD LINE TOWARDS ROKG AND WOULD BE DISTURBED BY ANY EVIDENCE OF ROK TRADE TIES WITH EE COUNTRIES.

7. GEOFF BRADY, ASST SECY TARY, NORTH ASIA BRANCH, DFA, TOLD EMBOFF MAY 14 THAT ROK EMBASSY MAY NOT HAVE FULLY GRASPED POSITION OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT THAT AUSTRALIA WOULD PURSUE NORTH KOREAN CONTACT AND WOULD NOT ALLOW ITSELF TO BE PRESSURED. HE NOTED THAT ALL KOREANS WERE DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH, AT TIMES. HE ADDED PHILOSOPHICALLY THAT NORTH KOREANS IN JAKARTA, FOR THEIR PART, HAD REPEATEDLY INTERPRETED AUSTRALIAN INQUIRIES IN EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES ON RECOGNITION OF ROK AS AN ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH "CONDITIONS" FOR AUSTRALIAN RECOGNITION OF DPRK. AUSTRALIANS HAD ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS MADE IT CLEAR TO NORTH KOREANS THAT THEIR INQUIRIES IN EASTERN EUROPE WERE IN NO SENSE EFFORT TO ESTABLISH ANY "CONDITION" ON DPRK RECOGNITION. BRADY SAID HE HAD CONSIDERED POSSIBILITY THAT TRANS-LATION PROBLEM MIGHT BE INVOLVED, AS CONTACTS WITH NORTH KOREANS IN JAKARTA HAVE OFTEN BEEN IN INDONESIAN, WITH SUBSEQUENT TRANS-LATIONS INTO ENGLISH AND KOREAN. HOWEVER, SOME OF THE CONVERSATIONS IN JAKARTA HAVE BEEN DIRECTLY INTERPRETED FROM ENGLISH INTO KOREAN, AND SHOULD BE NO REASON FOR MISUNDERSTANDING.

8. BRADY SUMMARIZED PRESENT SITUATION AS FOLLOWS:

A) UNTIL AUSTRALIAN ELECTIONS OVER AND NEW GOVERNMENT FORMED, GOA WILL TAKE NO FURTHER ACTION ON CONTACTS WITH NORTH KOREA.

B) IF LABOR GOVERNMENT RETURNS TO OFFICE, AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY IN JAOARTA HAS INSTRUCTIONS TO AWAIT A FURTNER INQUIRY FROM THE NORTH KOREAN EMBASSY AND TO REPORT DETAILS OF ANY SUCH INQUIRY.

C) IF LIBERAL-COUNTRY COALITION IS ELECTED, IT WILL BE UP TO NEW GOVERNMENT TO MAKE A DECISION ON ISSUE OF RELATIONS WITH NORTH KOREA.
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 CANBER 02913 150826Z

9. AS NOTED IN REF B, A MEMBER OF STAFF OF OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN HAS TOLD US OPPOSITION WOULD NOT RPT NOT PURSUE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS WITH DPRK SHOULD IT WIN ELECTIONS MAY 18.
GREEN

NOTE BY OC/T: DISTRIBUTION COORDINATED WITH S/S-O, MR. TWOHIE, 5/15.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, RECOGNITION, FOREIGN RELATIONS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 15 MAY 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GarlanWA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974CANBER02913
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: DG ALTERED
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740119-0755
From: CANBERRA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740547/aaaabpkl.tel
Line Count: 161
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: A) SEOUL 3010 B) CANBERRA 2521
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GarlanWA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 MAY 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <22 MAY 2002 by shawdg>; APPROVED <19 FEB 2003 by GarlanWA>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: AUSTRALIAN CONTACTS WITH NORTH KOREA
TAGS: PFOR, KS, KN, AS, (WILLESEE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005